The Bowen Technique Giving the Right Signals

by Janie Godfrey

Sunday Times health journalist Susan Clark wrote of The Bowen Technique: "The patients I have seen treated with Bowen report a feeling of deep, peaceful relaxation after a session and it is extraordinary to see the body react. As a patient, you feel only the gentlest pressure because the technique is completely painless. Practitioners report excellent results with persistent and difficult to treat conditions."

The Bowen Technique is an effective therapy for just about whatever ails you: sports- or work-related injuries; muscular-skeletal pains, strains and disorders; stress and tension based problems; respiratory problems; help with muscle spasm and dysfunction as a result of cerebral palsy or stroke, and more.

The technique was developed by a gifted and innovative therapist called Tom Bowen in Australia in the 1950's. The results of his treatments spoke for themselves however, and Tom Bowen was one of the busiest therapists of his time.

WHAT IS A TREATMENT LIKE?

In a word, gentle. The practitioner uses thumbs and forefingers to apply Bowen's unique sets of rolling-type 'moves' on very precise points of the body. These moves stimulate the muscles, soft tissue and energy within the body and prompt the body to begin the process of repair and balance. The work can be done through light clothing and a key feature of the technique is the inclusion of short breaks after each set of moves during which the therapist leaves the room. These breaks give the body time to respond to the stimulation given through the moves and for the work to begin to take effect. In addition, an experienced therapist is not simply using a set of pre-determined procedures, but is working according to the physical changes of each client and the breaks enable the therapist to make effective comparisons.

BACKS - THE USUAL CULPRITS

One of the most common complaints brought to Bowen therapists is back pain and Bowen is a very welcome, gentle treatment for a back that is already in pain and spasm, trying to protect itself from any jarring or movement. In The Bowen Technique, there are no physical adjustments or high velocity thrust movements, so the patient has nothing to fear. It is not the therapist that imposes the nature of the repair work, but the body itself does this in response to the stimulation of the Bowen moves. Bowen treatment marshal's the body's own restorative abilities to get on with the repair needed.

CASE HISTORY - BACK PAIN AND HEADACHE

woman, aged 31 3 treatments

K. suffered from low energy and tension in the upper back and neck, causing pain and severe headaches. She came for her first Bowen treatment with an awful headache and was amazed as it disappeared after the treatment and did not recur. Furthermore, much of the tension eased. She received two more treatments and improvement continued into resolution.

CASE HISTORY - INNKEEPER

man, aged 38 5 treatments

M. had a history of at least 15 years of lower back pain, especially on the right side. He developed the habit of standing on his left leg to spare the right whenever possible. He was very nervous of doctors & hospitals, and had had one treatment with another type of therapy a few years earlier that had left him with excruciating pain afterwards. So he was very wary of any sort of treatment but needed to do something. The gentleness of Bowen was very reassuring and he was able to relax completely. After only two treatments, he experienced considerable improvement but wanted to have several more treatments to make sure the problem was resolved. After 3 years, he is still doing well with no recurrence of his back problems.

CASE HISTORY - HOUSEWIFE woman, aged 68 2 treatments T. has "always" had an ache in the lower back but had had severe pain there for at least a month and in the few days before coming for treatment, the pain had been "unbearable". She probably injured it doing heavy housework. Years ago, her doctor told her there was a partially impacted disc on the right side, but surgery was not worth it. In the week following her first treatment, the pain virtually disappeared. When she came for her second treatment, she said "it's 99% gone - I can't believe it!" This resolution has held for several years now.

CASE HISTORY - MANUAL WORKER

man, aged 55 2 treatments & occasional 'top-ups'

J. had injured his back at work 12 years previously and was off work a few weeks at that time. Since then, the back pain would flare up about every 3 years and he would be in pain and off work each time for a few weeks until it slowly settled again. J. had been in the throes of another episode for two months when he came for Bowen. He was astonished that, after the first treatment, the sharp pain eased considerably and he was able to move much more freely. After the second treatment, the problem was gone and his movement completely restored. He continued to have a Bowen 'top-up' about every 4 or 5 months to keep any problems at bay and because the treatment is so relaxing and generally health-promoting.

For some, the reactions to Bowen are very surprising, considering the gentleness of treatment. Common reactions following a treatment can be a few days of stiffness, soreness, headache and feeling like "I've been hit by a steamroller!" These are all excellent signs as they demonstrate that the body itself has started the repair. This process is generally rapid and it is not uncommon for even longstanding pain to be reduced or resolved in two or three treatments.

Although muscular skeletal problems such as back and neck pain are the main reasons that people come for Bowen treatment, it is also effective with more organic problems. Bowen is used with asthma, migraines, irritable bowel syndrome and chronic fatigue with good results. And, happily, hayfever in most people responds brilliantly to Bowen treatment, especially if the treatment is given about a month before the hayfever season begins.

It is important to remember that there are no guarantees in life, but it is heartening to know that Bowen can and does consistently give a significant improvement or a complete resolution to around 80% of the people who come for treatment. Not bad odds at all.

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